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Burgess, Francis
Verdi's Rigoletto

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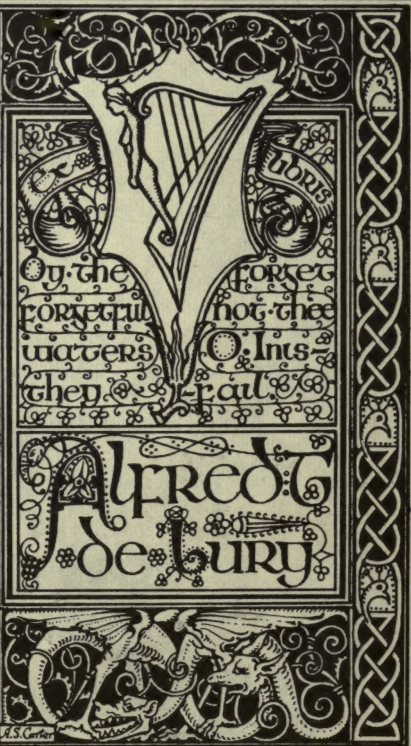


NIGHTS AT THE OPERA

VERDI'S
RIGOLETTO

By Francis Burgess

(F.S.A., Scot.)





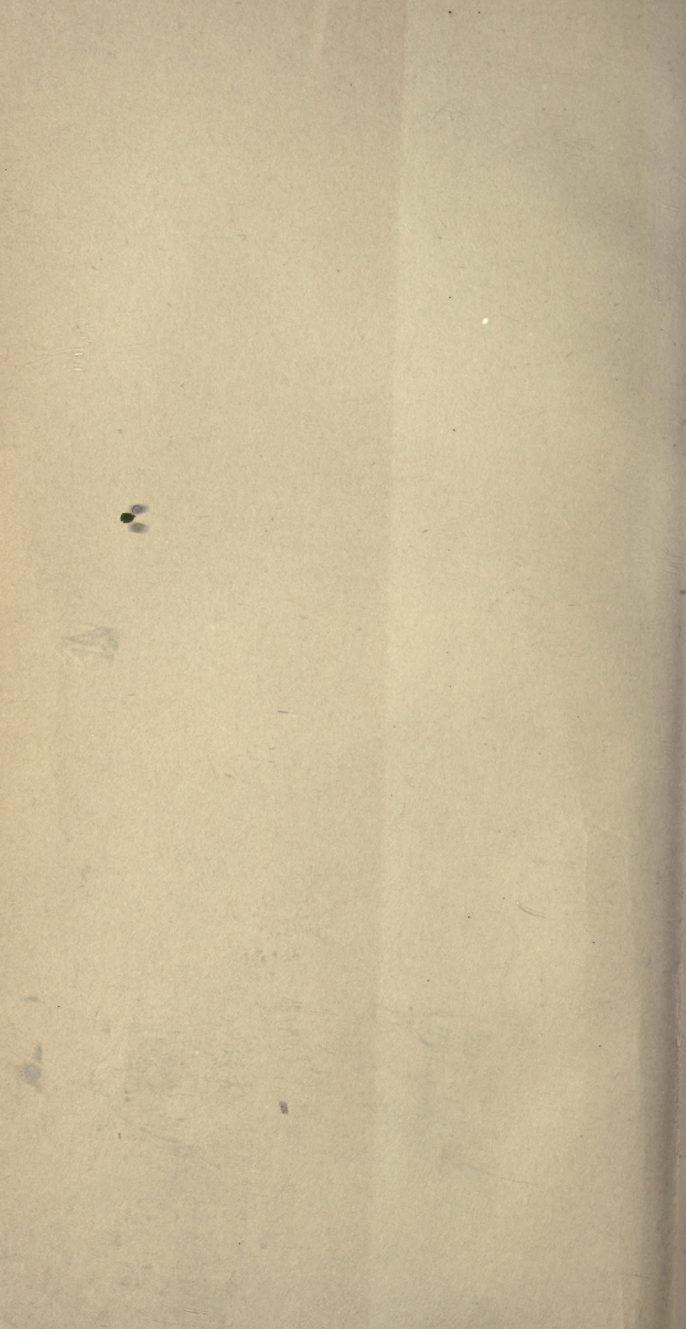
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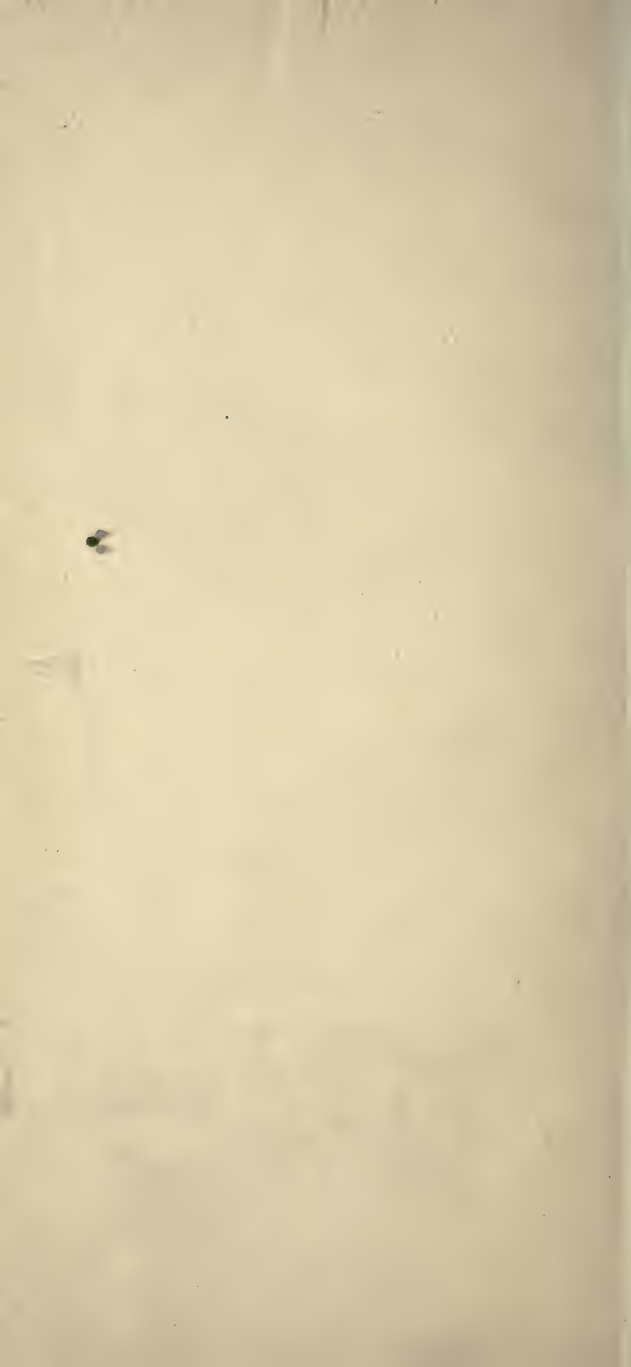
NIGHTS AT THE OPERA



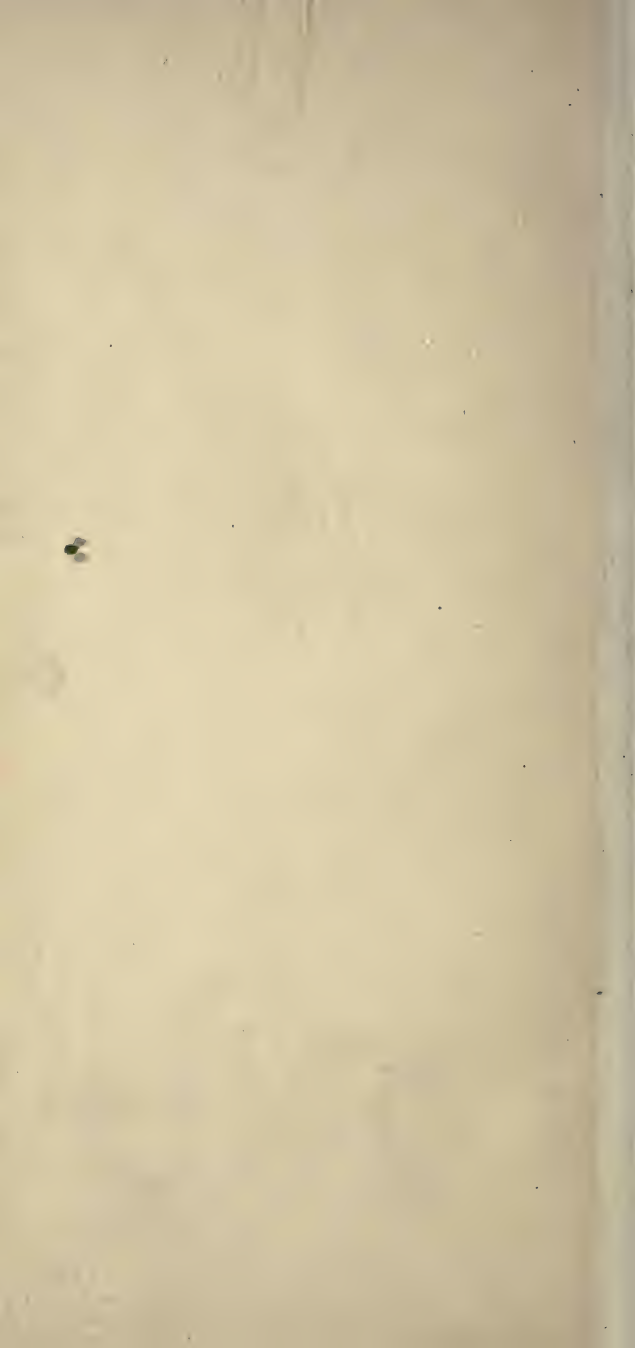
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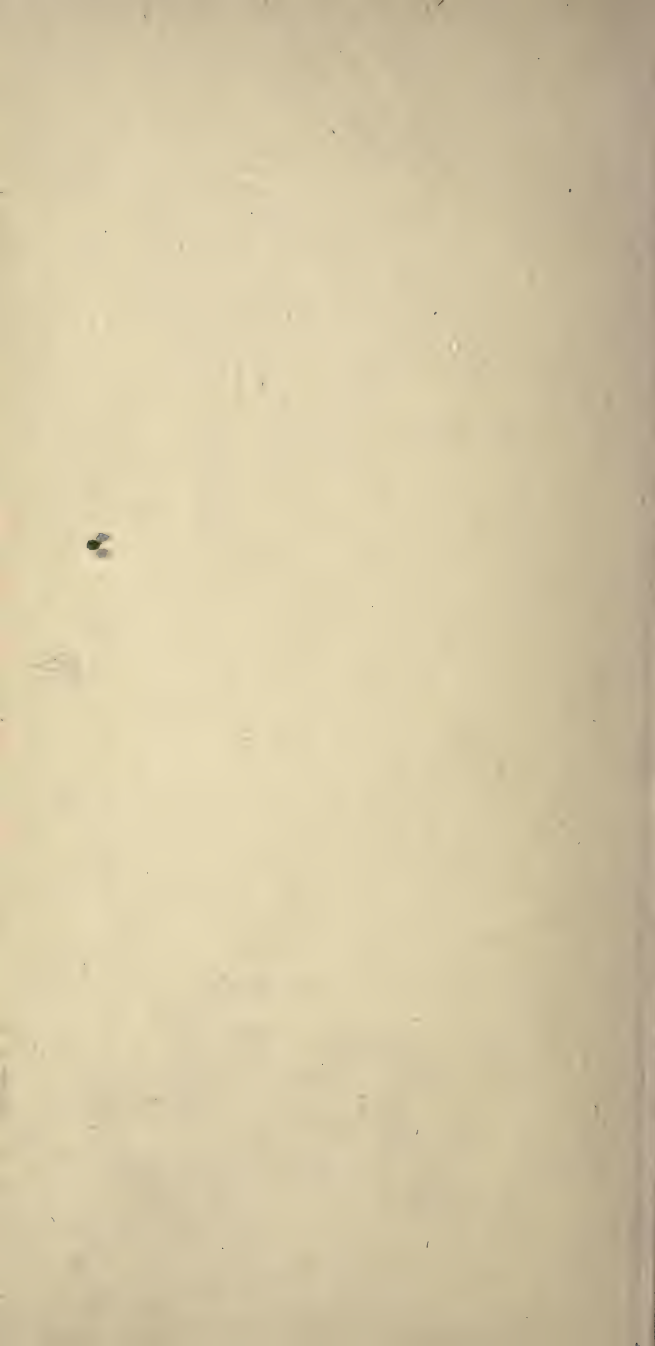
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I. VERDI, THE PATRIOT.

IT is interesting to remember that Verdi, in later life the idol of Italy, was, as a young man, refused admission to the Milan Conservatoire. Through the influence of his early patron, Antonio Barezzi, the young musician had obtained a grant of 600 lire a year for two years in order that he might pursue his studies in Italy's chief musical centre. Verdi applied for admission to the Conservatoire as a paying pupil, and went through an informal examination at the hands of some of its professors, producing his compositions and playing a piece on the piano. He was rejected, and recommended to choose a master unconnected

Verdi's

with the institution. Verdi, himself, writing of the incident in 1880 knew nothing of the reasons which prompted this extraordinary action of the Conservatoire authorities. It resulted in Lavigna becoming Verdi's master, and there can be no doubt as to the benefit which the young and impressionable genius derived from his intercourse with the older composer.

Verdi's next conflict with the "powers that be" occurred after the death of Ferdinando Provesi, organist at Busseto Cathedral. Provesi, who formerly had been Verdi's instructor, was a man of some power, and it had been understood that his young pupil was to succeed to his post. Indeed, it was on this understanding that the local *Monte di Pietà* had given Verdi the necessary money for the furtherance of his studies at Milan.

Rigoletto

At Provesi's death, therefore, Verdi was called back to Busseto, but, to the astonishment of everybody, the cathedral authorities appointed one Giovanni Ferrari, passing over Verdi on account of his having studied stage music. The controversy which ensued attained considerable proportions. The local philharmonic society refused to continue to give their help at the cathedral services. They even broke into the church and forcibly removed the scores which belonged to them, and finally they secured Verdi's appointment as organist at a Franciscan chapel whose musical attractions speedily eclipsed those of the cathedral.

Verdi's return to Milan took place in 1838, and was soon followed by the great tragedy of the young composer's life. His wife (whom he had married in 1836)

Verdi's

and his two young children died within a space of two months and he was left alone in the world. Grief paralysed his efforts for a time, but in 1842 he produced *Nabucco* in Milan, and this was the starting-point of his success as an operatic composer. With *I Lombardi alla prima crociata* Verdi's political troubles began. Signor Visetti, in his recently published booklet on the composer, tells us that "during the more active period of Verdi's working life the political situation of Italy was one of most acute tension. His advent at this stage of affairs had a very far-reaching effect, and it may be truly said that his music was charged with a burning patriotism that did more to fan the embers of revolution than that of any other writer." *I Lombardi* brought Verdi into direct conflict with the authorities. Before its actual production the

Rigoletto

Archbishop of Milan communicated with Torresani (the chief of police), denouncing the libretto as profane and irreverent and threatening to communicate directly with the Austrian Emperor unless the performance was vetoed. Merelli, the impresario, and Solera, the writer of the libretto, were thereupon summoned to appear before Torresani. Verdi also was summoned, but refused to appear or to alter his work. However, Merelli and Solera managed so to impress Torresani with the greatness of the opera that the chief of police consented to its performance with some trifling alterations in the text. Naturally, the work had an enthusiastic reception, and the patriotic Milanese went wild over the chorus, *O Signore, dal tetto natio*, which had to be repeated over and over again.

Similar difficulties arose over the

Verdi's

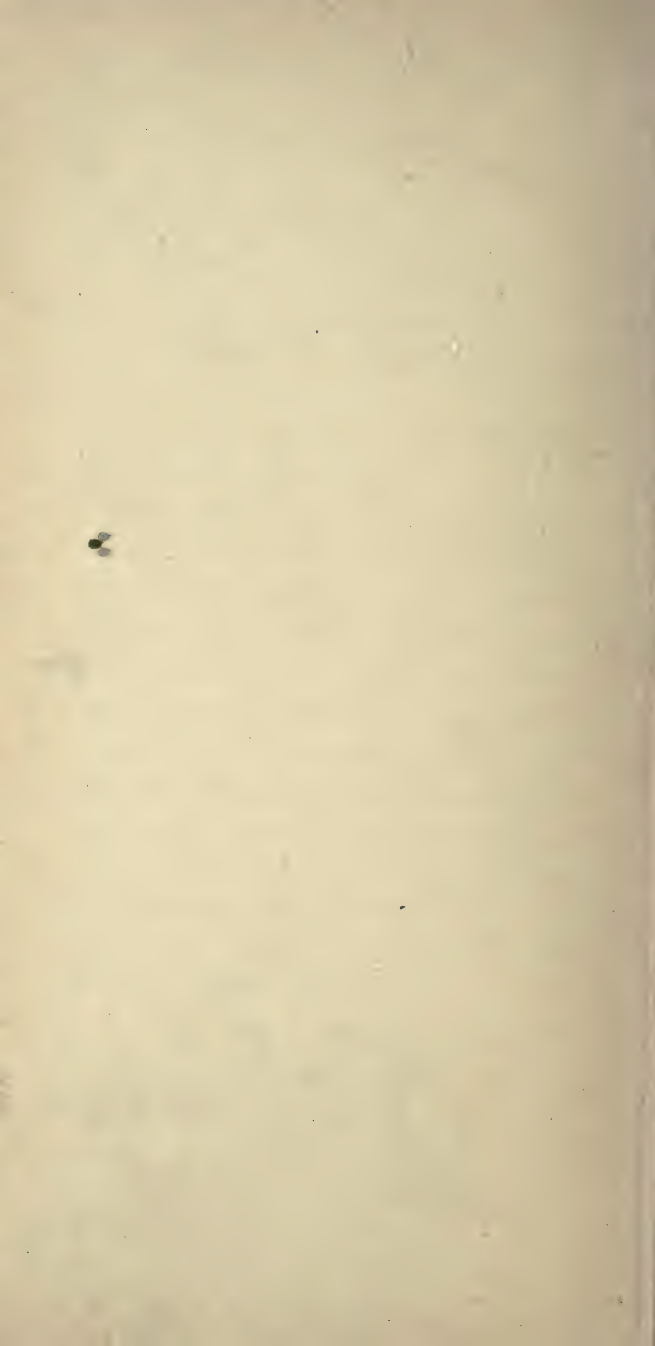
production of *Rigoletto* at Venice in 1851, and again in connection with *Un Ballo in Maschera*. The last-named opera was originally called *Gustavo III.*, but Orsini had made an attempt on the life of Napoleon III. a short time before, and the police ordered Verdi to change the title and to alter the words of the opera. Verdi refused, of course, and the work was interdicted. The people of Naples, where the opera was to have been produced, were furious at the action of the authorities. A demonstration of public feeling was made and cries of "Viva Verdi!" were constantly to be heard in the streets. A compromise eventually was effected by which the title and the names of the characters were altered and the work was produced in Rome under the title by which it is now known.

After the War of Liberation, Verdi

Rigoletto

was, of course, a popular idol in United Italy, and in his later years decorations and honours were freely showered upon him. He was elected a member of the Italian Parliament to represent Busseto, his native place, but he soon resigned. In 1875 the King of Italy made him a Senator, but he never attended a sitting.

After his death in January, 1901, the Government proposed to accord him a State funeral, but it was found that he had left directions for his burial to be carried out in the simplest manner possible, without flowers or music. His body now lies in the chapel of the House of Rest for Musicians which he founded during his life-time, and to which he had bequeathed the bulk of his estate.



II. THE STORY OF THE OPERA.

PIAVE, the author of the libretto, has founded his story upon Victor Hugo's "Le Roi s'amuse." Originally it was intended to retain the character of François I., the Italian title being *La Maledizione*. The authorities objected to this scheme as being likely to engender revolutionary feelings, and eventually the King was changed into a Duke, the title being altered to *Rigoletto*, although the dramatic construction remained the same.

The "hero," who gives his name to the opera, is a crooked and hump-backed jester in the service of the Duke of Mantua. Rigoletto's mind is as stunted

Verdi's

and warped as his body, and he is known as a pamperer of the licentious tastes of his master. Through his connivance the Duke has destroyed the domestic happiness of two noblemen of the court, Count Ceprano and Count Monterone. Both have vowed to be revenged, and the Count of Monterone has openly accused the Duke of ruining his daughter. Being condemned to prison for this statement he solemnly pronounces the curse of heaven upon the miscreants—master and man. Rigoletto, terrified by this imprecation, retires to the house where his daughter lives in seclusion. Anxious for the well-being of Gilda, Rigoletto keeps her existence a secret from the world, and she lives in close confinement, leaving the house but once in each week in order to attend church. The Duke of Mantua

Rigoletto

has, however, noticed her beauty on seeing her at her devotions and, disguised as a student, he manages to declare his love.

Meanwhile, Count Ceprano has discovered Rigoletto's secret visits to Gilda and, as the house in which she is confined is next door to his own, he invents a plan to punish the jester. A band of his followers pretend that they are about to abduct the Countess Ceprano, and, securing Rigoletto's assistance, they cause him while blindfolded to hold a ladder against his own house while they really secure possession of Gilda. As soon as they have obtained their prize and are gone Rigoletto unties the bandage from his eyes, only to discover that he has assisted in accomplishing the dishonour of his own daughter.

The wretched jester conspires to kill

Verdi's

the Duke, and for this purpose hires an assassin, named Sparafucile, who is to do the deed with the help of Maddalena his sister. Maddalena allures the Duke to a secluded inn, but there he so charms her with his manners, that she determines to betray the jester's purpose, and to save the Duke from the danger which threatens him. While this is going on Rigoletto causes his daughter to don man's clothes before departing to Verona, and leads Gilda to the inn where the Duke is paying court to Maddalena, that she may see how faithless her lover is. As Gilda is in hiding outside the inn she overhears Maddalena pleading with Sparafucile to spare the Duke's life. The assassin declares that the compact he has entered into with Rigoletto must be kept or that, at all events, a substitute must be found for the Duke. Gilda,

Rigoletto

in her intense love for the man who has dishonoured her, determines to save the Duke's life by the sacrifice of her own, and entering the inn is stabbed to the heart by Sparafucile, her body being placed in a sack. Rigoletto returns to enquire how the plot has fared, and on paying the sum of money arranged is handed the sack. As he is exulting over the death of his master and the avenging of his daughter's shame, he hears the Duke's voice from behind. Filled with horror he opens the sack, and finds the body of his dying daughter.

In an agony of grief and despair he

falls down by her side, and

on this scene the

curtain

falls.



III. THE PRODUCTION OF THE OPERA.

“**R**IGOLETTO” is the seventeenth (in order of production) of Verdi’s twenty-nine operas. It comes immediately before *Il Trovatore* and *La Traviata*, and marks the beginning of the composer’s second period.

The political difficulties which attended its production have already been related in Chapter II. The opera as altered was produced at the Teatro Fenice at Venice on March 11th, 1851. The enthusiasm with which it was received was remarkable. It was a much finer work than any which Verdi hitherto had accomplished. Signor Visetti relates an interesting incident connected with the production

Verdi's

of "Rigoletto." The composer was aware that the melody *La Donna è mobile* (see page 39) if heard before the first performance would be all over Venice in a few hours. Great precautions therefore were taken to prevent the tune leaking out. It was divulged to the tenor soloist, Mirate, only two days before the production, and then only on condition that he kept the melody a profound secret, not even humming the notes outside his own house.

"Rigoletto" was first performed at Covent Garden in May of 1853. The *Illustrated London News* of May 21st of that year thus criticises it:—

"We have never been the champions or detractors of Verdi, but we recognise in *Rigoletto* a higher order of beauty than struck us even in *Ernani* and *I due Foscari*, and an abandonment of his most palpable defects. *Rigoletto* cannot be ranked, however, as a

Rigoletto

masterpiece. It is full of plagiarisms and faults, but yet abounds with the most captivating music."

On January 19th, 1857, "Rigoletto" was produced at the Théâtre des Italiens, Paris. For over fifty years the opera has held a recognised place in the affections of opera-goers.

The vocal score of the opera is published by Messrs. Ricordi and Co., and is also included in Messrs. Novello's octavo edition, with an English translation by Lady Macfarren, upon which the present writer has drawn in the illustrations in Chapter V. "Rigoletto" is also included in Messrs. Boosey and Co.'s "Royal Edition" of operas.



IV. CHARACTERS REPRESENTED IN THE OPERA.

THE DUKE OF MANTUA (*tenor*).

RIGOLETTO, his jester, (*baritone*).

SPARAFUCILE (*bass*).

COUNT MONTERONE (*baritone*).

MARULLO (*baritone*)

BORSA (*tenor*).

COUNT CEPRANO (*bass*)

} Court
gentle-
men.

GILDA, daughter of Rigoletto (*soprano*).

GIOVANNA, her nurse (*mezzo-soprano*).

MADDALENA, sister of Sparafucile
(*contralto*).

COUNTESS CEPRANO (*mezzo-
soprano*).



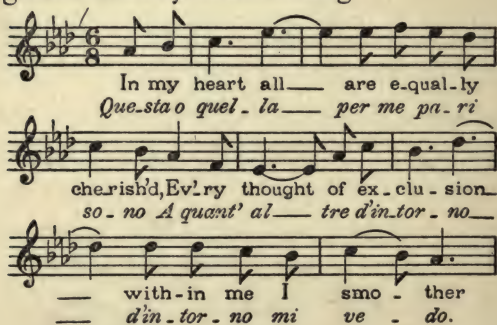
V. MUSIC AND STORY SIDE-BY-SIDE.

FIRST ACT.

The Prelude opens with a bold unison passage for the orchestral brass, relieved at once by a soft phrase in which the wood-wind is heard. The strings then commence a similar figure *pianissimo*, which gradually works up into a tremendous *tutti* climax, fitly preparing the audience for the splendour of the scene upon which the curtain now rises—an apartment in the ducal palace opening out into further rooms, all brilliantly lighted, in one of which a band is heard playing a sprightly air. Guests and pages are seen passing and repassing, while dancing takes place in

Verdi's

one of the inner rooms. The Duke of Mantua enters conversing with Borsa, a court gentleman, to whom he relates his pursuit of the unknown girl (Gilda), whom he has followed to church for three months past. A group of ladies and knights now enter, and Borsa draws attention to their fair array, while the Duke expresses his admiration for the Countess Ceprano, with whom he is also in love. This leads to the first of the many charming airs in the opera, a gallant melody commencing:



The musical score consists of three staves of music in 6/8 time, with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). The melody is written in a treble clef. The lyrics are provided in both English and Italian, with the English lyrics in italics and the Italian lyrics in a standard font.

In my heart all — are e-qual-ly
Que-sta o quel-la — per me pa-ri
 cherish'd, Ev'ry thought of ex-clu-sion—
so-no A quant' al — tre d'in-tor-no —
 — with-in me I smo-ther
 — d'in-tor-no mi ve-do.

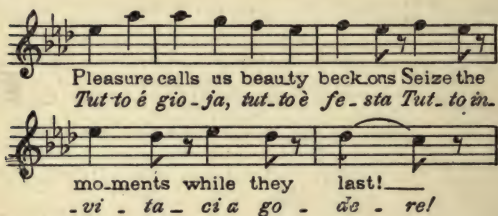
Rigoletto

in which the Duke boasts of his many amorous adventures. While a minuet is being danced by some of the courtiers the Duke leads forward the Countess Ceprano, who tells him of her impending departure. The gallant reproaches her for her cruelty, and confesses his love while she bids him calm his passion. As he leads her away Rigoletto, the Duke's jester, asks Count Ceprano what it is that disturbs him, and as the Count with a gesture of impatience follows his wife the courtiers make a mockery of the Duke's infatuation.

While the dancing continues Marullo, another gentleman of the court, enters, and tells his friends that Rigoletto, the hunch-backed jester, is himself a lover, referring to his secret visits to Gilda. While those assembled are laughing at the thought the Duke enters, followed

Verdi's

by Rigoletto, whom he is consulting as to the best means of ridding himself of Count Ceprano, he being enraged at the attention which the Duke is showing the Countess. The scene works up into a brawl, and concludes with a fine chorus in which all the dancers take part, the principal theme of which commences,



As this number ends, the Count Monterone forces his way into the room and addresses himself to the Duke, who has robbed him of his daughter. Rigoletto derides the enraged father, who at last lays a curse upon the Duke and his jester. While the assembled company

Rigoletto

deride Monterone with the chorus

A - way, thou au - da - cious dis -
Oh tu che la fe - sta au -
- turb - er of plea - sure. In so - li - tude
da - ce hai tur ba - to, Da un ge - nio d'in -
curse and re - vile at thy lei - sure,
fer - no qui fo - sti qui - da - to;

the superstitious Rigoletto is horror-stricken at the curse which has been pronounced upon him.

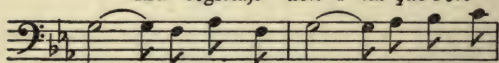
In the next scene the jester's house is visible, and adjoining it is a part of the palace of Count Ceprano. Rigoletto enters brooding over the curse, while Sparafucile, enveloped in a cloak and carrying a sword, is seen following at a distance. The bravo draws nearer, and offers his services to the jester, who, however, dismisses him for the present

Verdi's

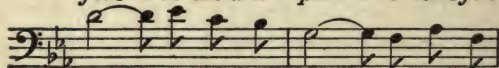
and continues to ruminate upon his lot. He enters the courtyard of his house, and Gilda, his daughter, meets him and throws herself into his arms. In an impassioned duet which follows the maiden asks why she is kept so rigidly in seclusion, and her father explains that he has many enemies. The jester charges Giovanna (her nurse) to keep watch over her, in a beautiful melody commencing:



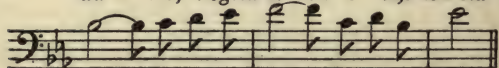
Ah! watch, I pray—thee o'er this
Ah! veg-lia, o don - na que - sto



flow - er, In its in - - no - cence con -
fio - - rè che a te pu - - ro con - fi -



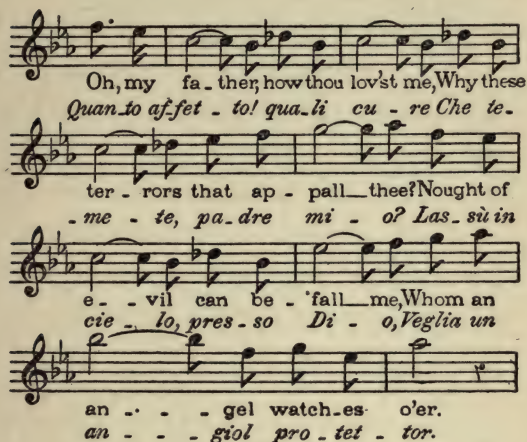
- fi - - ded to thy truth by hea - ven
da - - i; Veglia at - ten - ta, e non sia



gui - ded do thou guard it ev - er - more.
ma - i Che s'of - fu - schi il suo can - dor.

Rigoletto

which is succeeded by an equally beautiful melody sung by Gilda :

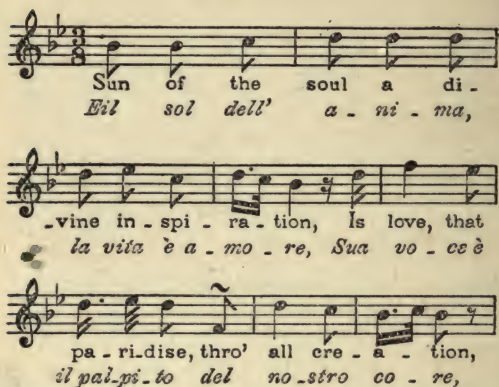


Oh, my fa - ther, how thou lov'st me, Why these
Quan-to af-fet - to! qua-li cu - re Che te -
ter - rors that ap - pall thee? Nought of
- me - te, pa - dre mi - o? *Las-sù in*
e - vil can be - 'fall me, Whom an
cie - lo, pres - so Di - o, *Veglia un*
an - - - gel watch-es o'er.
an - - - giol pro - tet - tor.

This is succeeded by a duet, at the end of which Rigoletto embraces his daughter and departs. Meanwhile the Duke is in hiding, and has bribed Giovanna to procure him an interview with Gilda. The Duke comes forth and declares his passion in a recitative passage, which

Verdi's

leads into the following air :

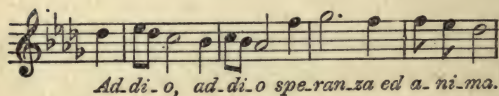


Sun of the soul a di -
Eil sol dell' a - ni - ma,

-vine in - spi - ra - tion, Is love, that
la vita è a - mo - re, Sua vo - ce è

pa - ri - dise, thro' all cre - a - tion,
il pal - pi - to del no - stro co - re,

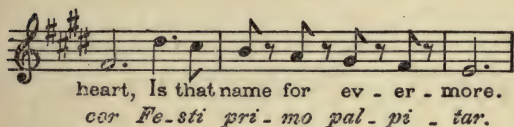
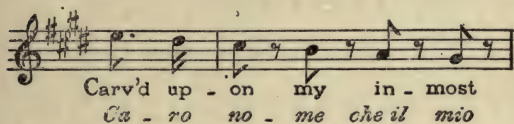
Gilda confesses that she returns his love, and as the Duke is about to leave her she joins with him in the duet,



Ad - di - o, ad - di - o spe - ran - za ed a - ni - ma.

Left to herself, the maiden sings her beautiful love-song,

Rigoletto



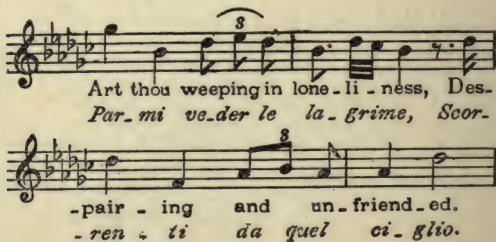
during which the stage gradually fills with courtiers, headed by Borsa and Count Ceprano, who have come to carry off Gilda out of revenge for the many wrongs which Rigoletto has done them. The jester himself comes upon the scene, and is persuaded by Marullo to assist in abducting, as he thinks, the Countess Ceprano. The ruse succeeds, and Rigoletto consents to be blindfolded and to hold the ladder for the courtiers, who ascend, not into the palace of Count Ceprano, but into the jester's own house. They secure Gilda and carry her off.

Verdi's

Rigoletto upon undoing the bandage finds his daughter's scarf, which has been dropped in the confusion. Terror-stricken he rushes into the house, only to discover that he has assisted in achieving his own daughter's ruin.

SECOND ACT.

The scene opens in the Duke's palace, where its master is found lamenting the loss of Gilda. He gives vent to his thoughts in the air,



Art thou weeping in lone - li - ness, Des -
Par - mi ve - der le la - grime, Scor -
- pair - ing and un - friend - ed.
- ren - ti da quel ci - glio.

at the end of which Marullo and the

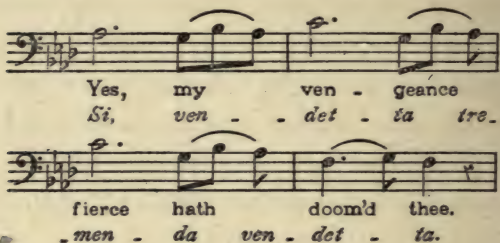
Rigoletto

other courtiers enter and relate their strange adventure. The Duke appears to them strangely excited over the incident, and eventually leaves them.

Rigoletto then enters, affecting to be indifferent to what has happened. When he learns that his daughter is now in the palace and that the Duke is with her, his feigned indifference turns to open madness, and he implores the nobles to allow him to go to her. Suddenly Gilda rushes from the room in which she has been concealed, and throws herself into her father's arms.

He now learns the whole story of the Duke's wooing in the guise of a poor scholar, and how it has led to his daughter's undoing. The enraged father standing before a portrait of the Duke, solemnly vows to be avenged, in the air :

Verdi's

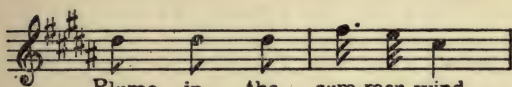


THIRD ACT.

The scene shows a lonely spot on the shores of a river. A half ruined inn is in the foreground, inside which Sparafucile, the assassin, is seated polishing his belt, while Rigoletto and Gilda are seen outside. The jester has determined to bring about the death of the Duke by the hand of Sparafucile, but before doing so he wishes to convince Gilda of her lover's faithlessness. Rigoletto leads his daughter to a point out-

Rigoletto

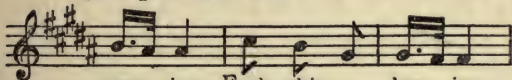
side the inn where a fissure in the wall exposes the interior. The Duke, disguised as a cavalry officer, enters the house and demands to be accommodated with a room and some wine. He sits down singing a wayward ditty of woman's inconstancy, commencing:



Plume in the summer wind
La don - na è mo - bi - le



Wayward - ly play - ing, N'er one way
Qual piuma al ven - to, Mu - ta d'ac



sway - ing, Each whim o - bey - ing.
cen - to, E' di pen - sie - ro.

while Sparafucile brings the wine and gives a signal for his sister Maddalena to enter. The Duke attempts to embrace her, but she eludes him, while

Verdi's

Sparafucile goes to consult Rigoletto as to the mode of the assassination. While the Duke is making love to Maddalena, Gilda and her father are watching, and at last the wretched girl realises that she is the victim of a heartless lover. The scene ends with a fine quartet taken by Gilda, Maddalena, the Duke, and Rigoletto. The jester now bids his daughter depart to Verona, and he and Sparafucile make arrangements for the Duke's assassination. Meanwhile, their intended victim continues to make love to Maddalena, who is so far impressed by him that she desires to save him from his impending fate. The Duke retires to his chamber and sleeps, while Gilda returns to the scene disguised as a man. She overhears the conversation between the assassin and his sister, in which Maddalena attempts to

Rigoletto

dissuade Sparafucile from his murderous purpose. He at last consents to permit a substitute for the Duke to be killed should some stranger arrive, and on overhearing this Gilda, anxious to save her faithless lover, knocks at the inn and asks for shelter. A great storm now takes place, and as its violence abates Rigoletto returns to the inn. As midnight strikes he knocks at the door and Sparafucile drags out a sack, in return for which the jester hands over the money agreed upon. As he is rejoicing over his fallen foe he hears the Duke's voice, and upon examining the sack he discovers therein the dying form of his own daughter. Gilda musters enough strength to tell him that she has sacrificed herself to save the life of the Duke, and then dies, killed through the plots of her father. The wretched

Verdi's Rigoletto

Rigoletto, as he falls senseless beside
the dead body of his
child, ex-
claims,

Ah, la Maledizione!

Nights at the Opera

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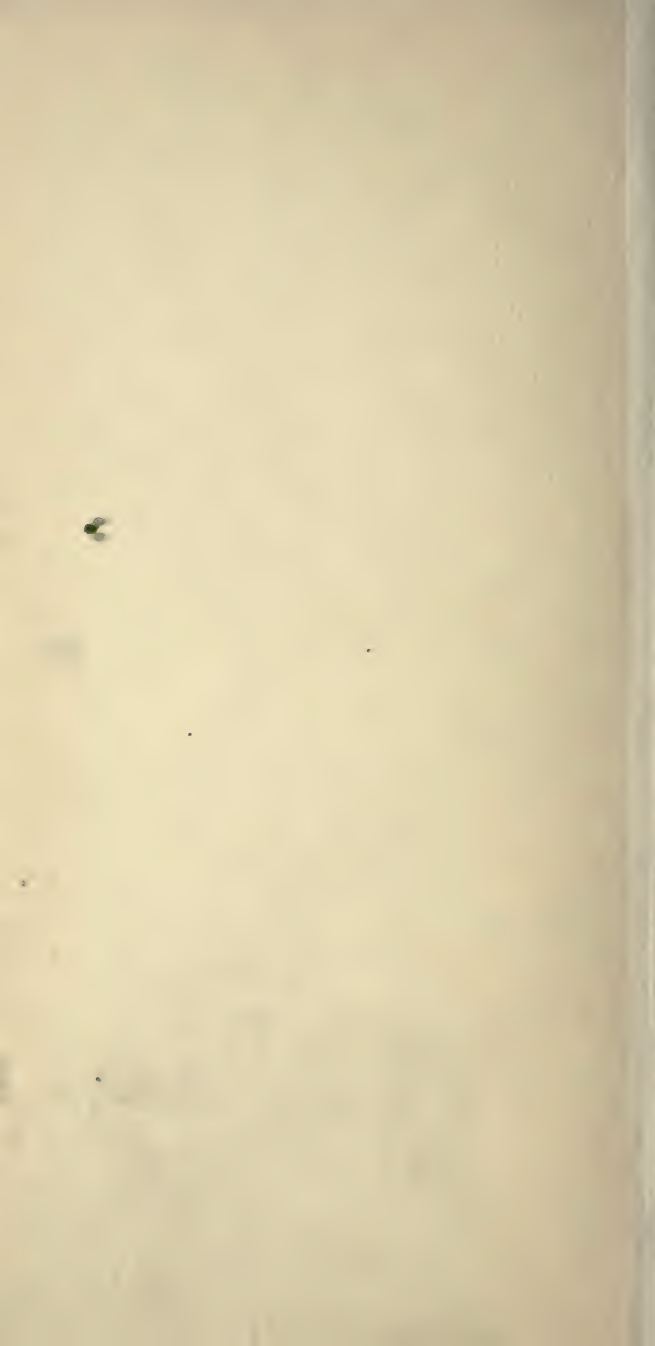
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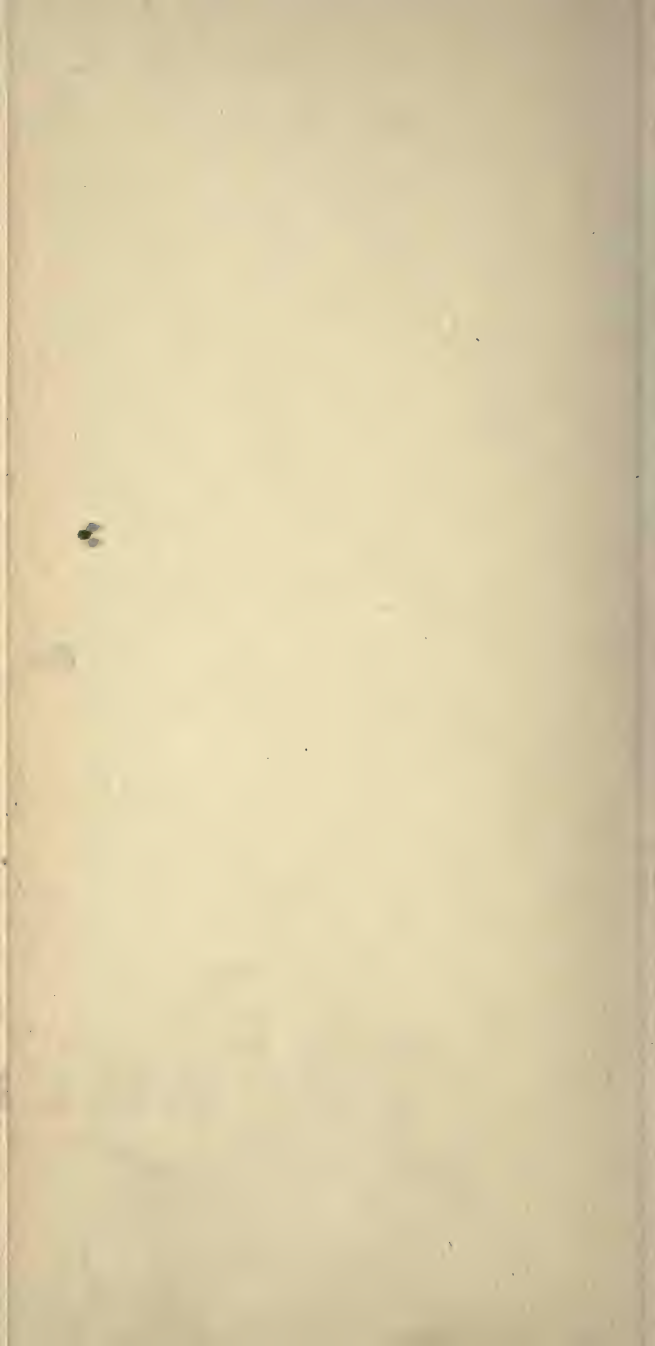
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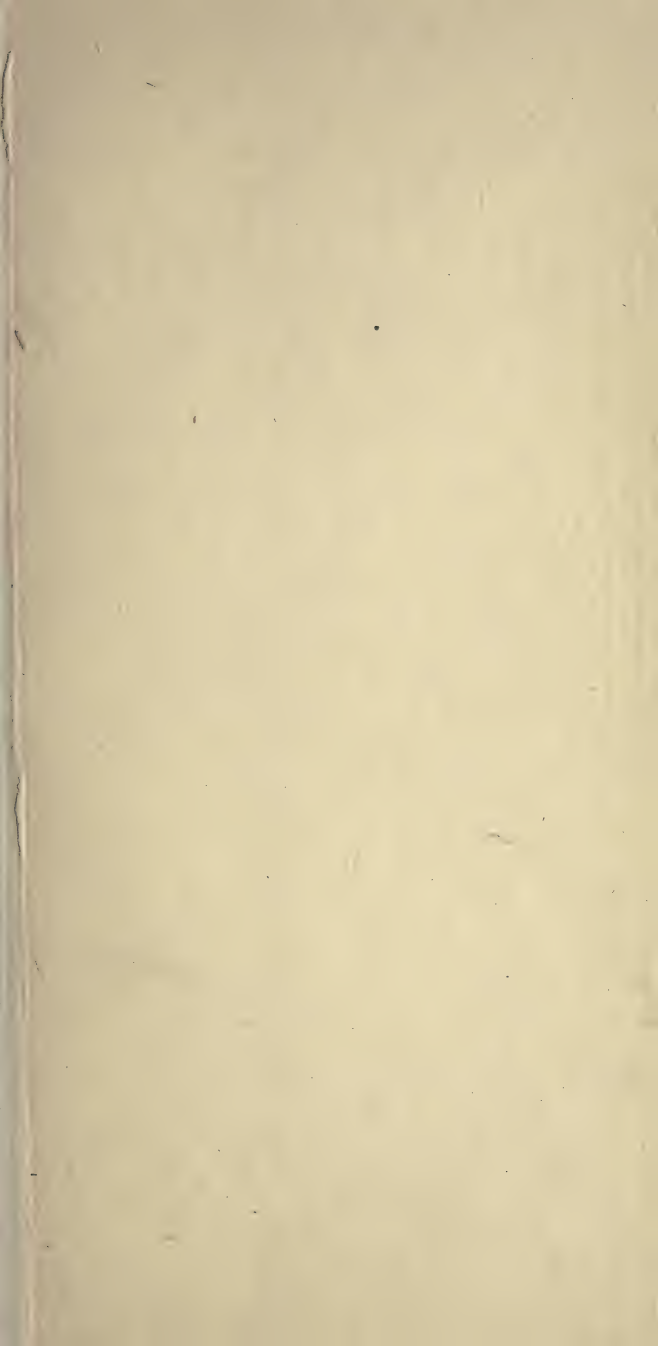
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| 8. FAUST | 11. RIGOLETTO |
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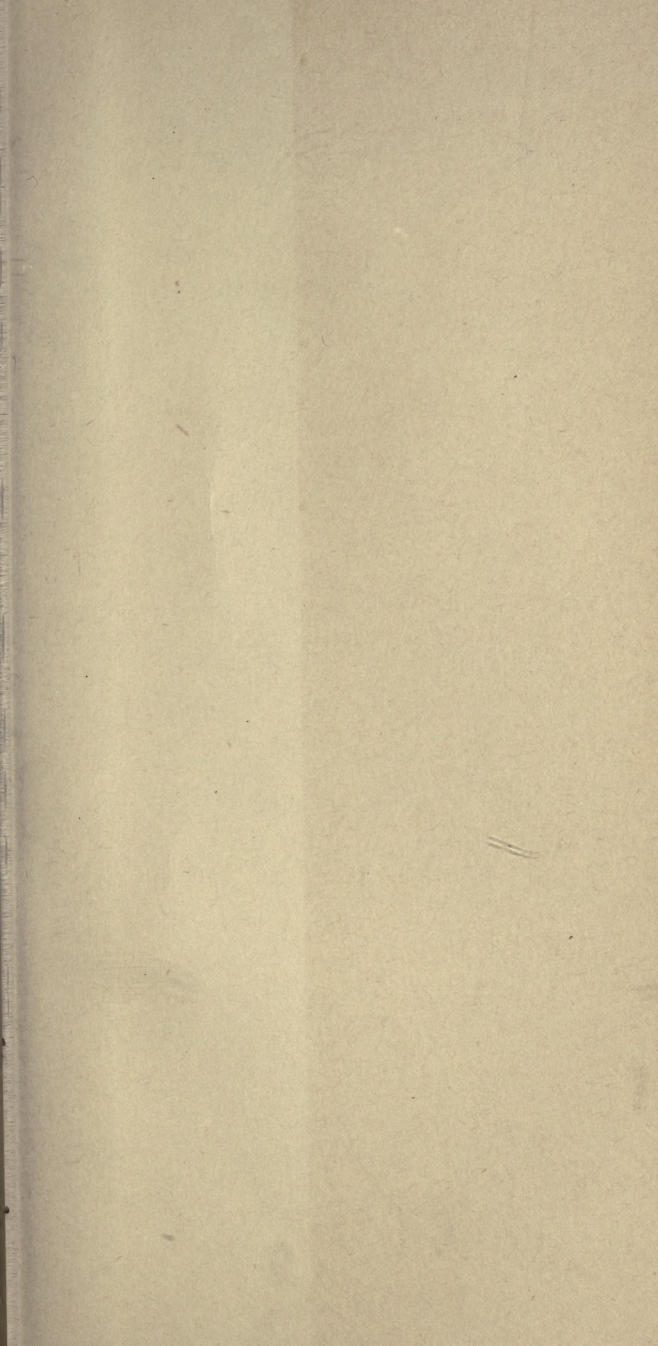
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